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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
2010 Volume VI: Evolutionary Medicine

The Impact of Disease on the Civil War

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This unit will focus on teaching middle school students about the impact of disease during the Civil War. When my students think about war they only envision video games, music videos, and movies. Teaching this unit will add to their vision and prior knowledge of war. I will impress upon students that the environment of the Civil War was filled with measles, syphilis, tuberculosis, smallpox and other diseases. During this unit students will connect the history of the Civil War with the history of the aforementioned diseases. We will explore the implications of how and why disease affected US history since the Civil War had the highest number of deaths from disease and not bullets. Exploration of the diseases will take place by traveling throughout the Civil War and discussing the relationships between the historical events that occurred. Simultaneously we will study how the diseases affected the soldiers' mortality before, during and after the war. Lastly students will be able to connect their history of diseases to how society deals with the diseases today.

(Developed for Special Education, Social Studies, Science, and Language Arts, grades 7-8; recommended for Middle School Special Education, Social Studies, Math, Science, and Language Arts, grades 7-8)

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